

The Implications of an Affluent Society on Gospel Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

In my readings in preparation for this paper I came across this little story that I would like to begin with. I found this in a Sermon Illustration program on my computer called Bible Illustrator.

We often put our affection on stuff that has a price tag. I read recently about an old, rich man with a cranky, miserable attitude who visited an elderly pastor for some help and guidance. The Pastor was a simple man whose heart was right and he lived a simple life. They weren't together very long before the Pastor got a wonderful idea on how to illustrate to the rich old man what was wrong. He took him by the hand and he led him over to his window and he said, "Now look out the window and tell me what you see."

The man stood there and said, "Well I see some men and some women and I see a few children."

The Pastor then took him by the hand and led him across the room to a mirror and said, "Now look there and tell me what you see."

The man frowned and said, "Well obviously I see myself."

"Interesting"; the Pastor replied. "In the window there is glass, in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little bit of silver. And no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, and only yourself." Maybe our troubles started when just a little bit of silver was added and we stopped looking through and starting looking at.

Now, I'm curious. What came to your mind when you read the title of this practical paper for our conference. Was your own personal answer to that title a negative answer. That a little bit of silver, or affluency, has a negative effect or creates a negative implication on the spread of the gospel?

When I was sharing this assignment with a friend, who is also a professor at our seminary, he looked at me and simply said - "It (the affluent society) makes it harder."

Today we want to take a look at the implications that an affluent society has on our ministry, the spread of the Gospel. As we do, we will see both the blessings and the challenges. The opportunities and the temptations. The warnings and the encouragement.

WHAT IS AN AFFLUENT SOCIETY?

The basic definition of affluency from the Webster's New World Dictionary is: flowing freely, plentiful, abundant, wealthy, rich.

Does this define our society that we live in today. Is it flowing freely? Is it plentiful and abundant with resources? Is it wealthy and rich?

It all comes down to our perception of where we fit in. A Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancy give this view in their book, "Fearfully Wonderfully Made."

Consider the world as if it were shrunk down to a community of 1000 persons:
In our town of 1000--

180 of us live high on a hill called the developed world; 820 live on the rocky bottom land called the rest of the world. The fortunate 180 on the hill have 80 percent of the wealth of the whole town, over half of all the rooms in town with over two rooms per person, 85 percent of all the automobiles, 80 percent of all the TVsets, 93 percent of all the telephones, and an average income of \$5000 per person per year. The not-so-fortunate 820 people on the bottom get by on only \$700 per person per year, many of them on less than \$75. They average five persons to a room.

How does the fortunate group of hill-dwellers use its incredible wealth? Well, as a group they spend less than 1 percent of their income to aid the lower land. In the United States, for example of every \$100 earned:

\$18.30 goes for food

\$6.60 is spent on recreation and amusement

\$5.80 buys clothes

\$2.40 buys alcohol

\$1.50 buys tobacco

\$1.30 is given for religious and charitable uses, and only a small part of that goes outside-the U.S.

I wonder how the villagers on the crowded plain—a third of whose people are suffering from malnutrition—feel about the folks on the hill?

Are the terrorist attacks of September 11th an indication of how they feel?

Are we living in an affluent society? The simple, basic answer is YES. Yet we recognize that it is a matter of comparison of where you are at in your location and time of life and other factors. Personally speaking, I'm poor when compared to certain families in the community where I live and even in comparison to some of the members of my congregation. Yet when compared to other families in the community and some members of the congregation I am rich or viewed upon by them as being affluent.

Appendix "A" and Appendix "B" give some comparisons of per capita income, the median household income, and the average costs of living in our region. Is there a lifestyle difference between those who live in such places as Boulder, CO versus the Navajo Reservation in the Farmington area? Undoubtedly, yet even within those two areas there are those who consider themselves struggling and looking at neighbors who they would view as affluent. Having no apparent financial cares or worries.

Dr. Ronald Sider in his book, *RICH CHRISTIANS In An Age of Hunger*; states matter-of-factly: "The North-South division is one of the most dangerous divisions in the world today. With one or two exceptions, the rich countries are in the Northern Hemisphere, and the poor countries are in the South. North America, Europe, and Japan are an affluent northern aristocracy. Our standard. of living is at least as luxurious in comparison with that of over a billion poor neighbors as was the lifestyle of the medieval aristocracy in comparison with their serfs" (pg. 19, *RICH CHRISTIANS In An Age of Hunger*. Ronald T. Sider. Word Publishing, 1990).

The fact that we live in the United States, despite what our bank statements might say and how tight our own personal budget is, makes us part of an affluent society. We are the fortunate ones living up on the hill. Exactly where we are on that hill does differ in regards to our own economic factors, but let us agree that from a worldly vantage point we are there on the hill.

We who are gathered here today, by the grace of God, are affluent in another important way. The holy, inerrant Word of God clearly states: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

By the incredible love of our Savior Jesus Christ and His ultimate sacrifice we, as members of God's family, are the definition of affluent. We are flowing free – free from the wages that our sins deserve: We are enjoying the abundance of God's manifold blessings. We are rich in the blessings He showers down upon us,

which the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, helps us to see. We are wealthy in the mercy of God's continual forgiveness.

God in His love for us all has come to us with this priceless treasure and has presented it to us as a true gift. The Apostle Paul in writing to the Ephesians desired them, and us, to behold and live in this wonderful truth. "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

And it is this spiritual affluency that Paul desires to share with all who will hear and that which God commands us to share. The words of our Lord in commissioning His disciples are familiar and yet appropriate here: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20). Paul expresses his humble desire to accomplish this and to share this affluency with all. "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the *unsearchable riches* of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8)."

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF AFFLUENCY ON OUR GOSPEL, MINISTRY?

By God's grace we are affluent. All those, wherever they might be situated here on earth, who have received the undeserved gift of faith are rich in the love of Jesus and the forgiveness He offers. The implication of this spiritual affluency is clear and wonderful. We are to rejoice in it (Philippians 4:4). We are to be thankful for it (Psalm 107:1). We are to share it with all nations of people (Matthew 28:19-20). This is the Gospel Ministry that a loving God has called us to be a part of. Note Paul's inspired Words in 2 Corinthians 5.

¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your consciences. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³ If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf. Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (NIV)

In the light of spiritual affluency we see a very positive implication. Yet, can the same be said for the material affluency that we in North America, and especially the United States enjoy? So often when we think of the material affluency of our society we think of the negatives and we recall the many accounts of affluent people unable to deal with the failure of not finding the ultimate richness of God's grace. Like the story of the one rich man that had committed suicide. In his pockets were found two items: \$30,000.00 in cash and a letter. The suicide letter read in part: "I have discovered during my life that piles of money do not bring happiness. I am taking my life because I can no longer stand the solitude and boredom. When I was an ordinary workman in

New York, I was happy. Now that I possess millions, I am infinitely sad and prefer death” (pg. 34, *Escape from the Money Trap*. Henry B. Clark. Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA. 1973).

It does seem that one of the implications of an affluent society causes people to act in selfish ways. How true this story is, I don't know, but even in a tongue-in-cheek way it makes a valid point.

A husband and wife were attending a county fair where, for five dollars per person, a man was giving rides on an old biplane. The couple wanted to go up but they thought the price was too steep. Consequently, they tried to negotiate a lower price. “We'll pay you five dollars for both of us,” they said to the pilot. “After all, we'll both have to squeeze into that tiny cockpit that was built for only one person.” The pilot refused to lower his price, but he made a counter-offer. He said to the couple, “Pay me the full price of ten dollars and I'll take you up. And if you don't say one word during the flight, I'll give you all your money back.” The couple agreed to the deal and got into the plane. Up they went and the pilot proceeded to perform every trick he knew, looping and whirling and flying upside down and lots more. Finally, when the plane had landed, the pilot said to the husband, “Congratulations! Here's your ten dollars; you didn't say a single word.” To which the man replied as he eagerly took the ten dollars, “Nope, but I almost did when my wife fell out.” (From *Bible Illustrator* - Index 2805)

The Scriptures also speak about the implications of affluency, or simply the challenges of money and riches in a person's life. Luke 12:15-23

¹⁵ Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” ¹⁶ And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”” ²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ²¹ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” ²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ Life is more than food; and the body more than clothes. (NIV)

The words of our Lord are clear. He speaks these words in love and encouragement that we might have a proper respect, and use for the material blessings that He grants to us. Yet what happens? What are some of the implications of an affluent society on our Gospel Ministry?

A couple of years back our Synod produced a binder for congregations to work through for the “Forward In Christ” Thank Offering: On page 4 of that binder as they presented some initial stewardship considerations they asked us to consider the following point:

WHY, in an era of unprecedented wealth (an affluent society), is nearly every congregation struggling to fund a bare bones ministry?

A couple of months ago we also saw the information shared in the Forward In Christ/Northwestern Lutheran about our Synodical Budget Concerns. We saw some of the effects of those budget concerns come out in the latest report from the Home Mission Board Meeting where the message was clear. Money is tight and so no new openings!

I feel that this is not just an “implication” of an affluent society, but it is an actual effect or result of an affluent society. Our Savior cautions us time and time again against greed. He warns us against the seeking of material wealth for our own personal pleasures. Yet, in 1987, \$109.6 billion dollars went into advertising “to convince us that Jesus was wrong about the abundance of possessions” (pg. 28. *RICH CHRISTIANS In An Age of Hunger*, R. Sider).

One of the clear negative implications of an affluent society on our Gospel Ministry is the competition for the dollar. An affluent society equals a consumer society. And though Jesus made it clear when He stated: ²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the others, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24), people in general and especially Christians in an affluent society strive to do just that - serve God and serve money. As our Synod struggles and congregations struggle with budgets and financial challenges, we strive to carry on our Gospel ministry in an affluent/consumer society.

David Henderson in his book, *Culture Shift - Communicating God's Truth to our Changing World*, lists some basic guiding principles in an affluent or consumer society.

The consumer culture shapes so much more than the way we spend our money. Consumer attitudes have crept into virtually every aspect of life, influencing the way we live, relate, and spend our time. Here are some of the guiding principles in a consumer society.

- * **Mix and match.** We don't feel bound to stay with one brand, or even one store. We'll buy a skirt at the department store, accessories at a mall kiosk that specializes in African jewelry, shoes across town at the outlet store, and a blouse through the mail from LL Bean. We'll pick and choose until we find the combination that suits us best. We readily carry that same mentality over into the realm of religion; there's nothing the least bit odd about blending a Christian view of God with a New Age view of earth and a dab of Tai Chi and Zen meditation on the side.
- * **Hunt for the bargain.** We don't want to pay a cent more than necessary, so we skimp, snoop, scrape, and bargain, all in an effort to give as little as we can to get as much as possible. What that often means is that the people we talk with are eager to consider the benefits of Christianity but reluctant to talk about the cost.
- * **Comparison shopping.** We'll go in one store and check out its prices and service, then walk down the street to see if we can get a better deal. We have no allegiance to any store. We are inveterate comparison shoppers. That, too, carries over into consideration of religious issues. People expect us to know about various religious options, and they want to know about them too. What, exactly, makes Christianity different from the other choices? And why should I choose Christianity?
- * **Does it fit me?** We don't have patience for the one-size-fits-all approach. We want -expect, even - what we buy to be just the right fit for us, whether it be a coat, a car, or a cat. Most people think about religion in the same way, not in terms of seeking what is true but of “finding a right fit,” landing on something that is “me”. It's about meeting my needs, not about submitting myself to God's call. That makes for some real challenges when talking about a faith in, which the Master says to the MasterCard generation, “Following me starts with dying to yourself.”
- * **Return policy.** If it doesn't fit or if it doesn't work or if we simply get tired of it after a while, we take it back. I want what I want, and I expect to get what I pay for, and if it isn't exactly what I wanted, I'll return it. That means we'll be impatient with surprises, just as much in a search for religion as in the purchase of a CD player. Don't make the faith out to be easy and then let me find out later that it ain't so.

(pg. 55 *Culture Shift*. David Henderson. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1998)

The affluent society that we find ourselves in today has implications in regards to our Gospel Ministry. Whether summed up in the observation and words of Mr. Henderson above, or by us, who have gathered here for this conference, taking the time to share our experiences and frustrations in relation to this subject.

One point of summary is this. The richer a society, a nation, or an individual person becomes the less willing they are to share. And there are the facts to back this up.

In one report it states that in 1960 the average person in the United States contributed \$21.70 a year to foreign aid (via our taxes and the government policies for foreign aid). In 1981 the average person contributed a paltry \$13.10 (pg. 32 *RICH CHRISTIANS in an Age Of Hunger*).

We have already referred to the reports that have been given by the Synod and the Home Mission Boards as other examples.

And as individuals, the accounts abound of wealthy people who hoard and hide their money, even wanting it buried with them; holding onto the false hope that they can take it with them instead of sharing it with anyone else.

One would then surmise that the implications of an affluent society are indeed negative when it comes to the Gospel Ministry of reconciliation that our Almighty God has charged us with. All we have to do is think of our Savior's words in Matthew 19:23-24

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (NIV)

That would cause a person to say Lord let me never be rich. Or as the one very wealthy television evangelist who was dying asked for, when asked by his staff what his final wish would be, said: "Before I die I would like to take a ride." And they asked the rich pastor what he required for that final ride before entering the kingdom of heaven. And he said, "I would like a very small camel and a very large needle" (Bible Illustrations Index 2806).

And yet not all aspects of an affluent society bring about only negative implications for Gospel Ministry.

In Philippians 4, Paul expresses his thanks and appreciation to the group in Philippi for the support that they had given to him. Look at these verses.

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

Why had the other groups not given? Was the group in Philippi more affluent? Or was it the other way around? Perhaps the other groups had not risen to a level of sanctified living and faithful stewardship. The key point is that thanks to the willingness and also the fact that the Philippians had resources to send to Paul, he was able to continue on with his ministry of reconciliation.

Why is the WELS present in the United States, in the Nebraska District, in states like Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming? The answer to this question expresses one of the key positive implications of an affluent society. It is the affluent societies, strong in economic resources and the highest standards of living,

that have led the way in sending out missionaries with the Gospel message. (pg. 17, *Mission and Money Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem*, Jonathan J. Bonk. Orbis Books. Maryknoll, NY 1990.) It was the “rich” European’s who sent Lutheran Pastors to the new developing America, and supported their ministry for years. We are no longer the “new” and developing fields. We have grown up into a RICH and AFFLUENT country. A blessing from God. A blessing, as with so many, that we are tempted to abuse and wreck with our sinful nature. As the pages before have shown in minor detail, we have done a great job in abusing this blessing of affluency. Yet it is a blessing that God still allows us to have for the purpose of using this treasurer to reach out to others. In both the World Mission front and the Home Mission front we have been striving to do just that.

The fact that, by the standards by which we measure, we are still an affluent society should heighten us to the keen reality that we must still use the abundant resources that our God blesses us with, proving faithful with them, in carrying on our Gospel Ministry. Our Savior in this parable gives us this encouragement. Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ ²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²² “The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said; you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ ²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²⁴ “Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ (Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest, ²⁸ “‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (NIV)

As a Bible Study on Stewardship reminds us – Money (affluency), is amoral. It is a blessing from God for us to use. In fact, God wants us to use the riches that He has blessed us with. Not to simply bury it in the back yard, or in the Church’s Savings Account. To stop putting all our energy and effort into looking at the accounting sheet and worrying about how much money is going out in comparison to how much money may come in. But to simply acknowledge the gift of the resources that we have and strive to be faithful in our use of the affluency that is ours.

Another area that we see a positive slant on the implications of an affluent society on our Gospel Ministry actually stems from one of the negative implications of an affluent society.

God in His Word encourages us to focus on Him and to achieve that level of contentment. (Hebrews 13:5, 1 Timothy 6:6, 8). He expresses His will in our sanctified living when we are commanded to not steal and

to not covet. God in His wisdom gives us these Words because He knows the temptations that are always there because of our sinful nature. As the affluency of a society grows so do the temptations to become covetous and thus the opportunity for other problems to arise. This causes people and society as a whole; to make sinful choices and to then to have to deal with the consequences of those actions. It is at this point that we have an opportunity for being very involved in our ministry of reconciliation. Allow me to share with you three quick examples of how this very need and opportunity is being expressed.

Douglas Coupland (born in 1961 is considered by many to be the mouthpiece of the baby busters' generation. He voices its dark humor, its not very subtle cynicism, and its bottom-line brusqueness. But he also expresses something of its heart. Look at this remarkably candid passage with which he ends his book *Life after God*: "Now - here is my secret: I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God - that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I am beyond being able to love."

Dennis DeYoung, lead singer for the rock band Styx, wrote a hit song called "Show Me the Way." Here are some of the words to that haunting song:

Every night I say a prayer
In the hopes that there's a heaven
But every day I'm more confused...

And I feel this empty place inside
So afraid that I've lost my faith
Show me the way

Now consider some of the words to a sudden hit song by Joan Osborne. "One of Us" gave Osborne two Grammy nominations and was performed live in front of more than a billion TV viewers on the 1996 Grammy Awards show.

If God had a name, what would it be
And would you call it to his face
If you were faced with him in all his glory
What would you ask him if you had just one question?

If God had a face, what would it look like
And would you want to see
If seeing meant that you would
have to believe in things like heaven
And in Jesus crud the saints and all of the prophets?

What if God was one of us?

(pg 219-220 *Culture Shift*)

These are only three of hundreds of similar expressions of thirst and longing that well up in the throats of our affluent society that has been led down the path of materialism and the love of more and more and still more. God has called us into the Gospel Ministry to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. To be used by God to lead those who are hurting and lost to the true riches of God's love, forgiveness, and eternal life.

How are our lights shining? How salty are we?

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO OUR OWN PERSONAL MINISTRY?

This is a practical paper. Up to this point we have been speaking in general terms and looking at our Gospel Ministry as a whole. I would like to wrap up this paper with asking us all to look at our own individual walk with God as both called workers in the public ministry and simply His children.

What implications does an affluent society have on you? I will not go around the room and asks for “True Confessions” nor will I take the rest of the time to set up a confessional booth. I will ask all of us to reflect for a moment on how we are affected by the world in which we live.

When was the last time you received that phone call informing you that another congregation or area of ministry in our Synod was extending a Divine Call to you? Think back to that time. How quickly did you want to find out what kind of salary was involved. How much did the financial picture play a role in your decision. Now please understand that I’m not accusing anyone of us of not properly and prayerfully considering the Calls that come our way. I recognize that in being good stewards of all that God has given to us, including our families, the financial considerations are important and that properly and perhaps out of true necessity there have been times in someone’s ministry that the financial situation ended up being one of the crucial factors in arriving at our decision. I Still feel compelled to bring this point up to ask us all to reflect on this fact and sincerely and earnestly ask how much of our living in the affluent society, with all our “necessities” or “niceties” has affected our willingness to pick up the cross and follow Jesus.

Let us again turn to our Savior as He teaches us in these parables and we are reminded of the incredible rich treasure that is ours by the grace of God. Matthew 13:44-46

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field ⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. (NIV)

The treasure of Jesus and His kingdom that He grants to us is the most important thing in the world. He truly is the fulfillment of our every longing and need. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts with these Words of truth and reminds us that there is nothing in this whole world that is more valuable than our relationship with the true God. Jesus is the answer to all our troubles, worries, and problems.

But note in these parables there is a cost. The man sold all he had, the merchant sold everything he had. As these parables remind us, to obtain and have the treasure that our Savior earned for us costs us everything that we have. And not just the checking and savings account, all our credit cards and automobiles and homes, but our very selves.

I John 1:8-10

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. (NIV)

I speak about myself here. Enjoying the blessings that God has given to me is a wonderful part of my life, and God has truly blessed me and my family in countless ways. Yet in preparing for this paper, reading not only the various verses in Scripture but the different books, I came to realize the easy trap that I so readily fall

into. That living in the affluent society that I do, that there have been so many times where the longing and desiring for more stuff has clearly interfered with living my faith as God would will me to do. That there are so many things readily available in our society to do and enjoy that they become an easy instrument for Satan to use against me that I have to get down on my knees and seek God's mercy and forgiveness because I have not always been faithful in discharging my duties as a pastor in His church. That I have allowed the love of this world to creep in and distract me from being a faithful servant. But I take heart because as John reminds us in that passage, God is faithful. He does forgive us for all our sins.

Brothers if we gain one thing out of this paper today, may it be that we recognize the enticing lies of Satan in our affluent society. That we turn to the full armor of God and we do all we can in the days that are left to be active in the ministry of reconciliation that we have the privilege to be a part of.

I close today with these words of encouragement and love from the Apostle Paul as he was inspired to write them to the believers in Philippi.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (NIV)

AVERAGE COSTS OF LIVING

	House Income	Income Taxes	Sale Tax	Prop Taxes	Mort- gage	Util- ities	Food	Health Care	Trans	Other	Total Costs
Boulder	\$71,500	\$2,008	\$603	\$1,268	\$22,192	\$3,878	\$10,027	\$4,594	\$10,477	\$3,283	\$58,330
Col Springs	\$56,000	\$2,008	\$603	\$695	\$13,870	\$3,537	\$9,364	\$4,594	\$10,070	\$3,185	\$47,926
Ft Collins	\$57,400	\$2,008	\$603	\$1,344	\$12,905	\$3,495	\$9,648	\$4,594	\$10,579	\$3,250	\$48,426
Salt Lake	\$62,900	\$2,658	\$603	\$1,465	\$14,714	\$3,623	\$9,364	\$4,417	\$10,375	\$3,316	\$50,535
Cheyenne	\$58,000	\$0	\$556	\$861	\$8,081	\$3,751	\$9,743	\$4,417	\$10,375	\$3,217	\$41,001
LOW											
Texarkana	\$48,300	\$2,225	\$558	\$951	\$5,186	\$3,410	\$8,891	\$4,284	\$9,867	\$3,119	\$38,491
HIGH:											
Honolulu	\$82,400	\$3,485	\$404	\$1,570	\$42,696	\$4,006	\$13,337	\$5,035	\$12,308	\$3,808	\$86,649

HOUSEHOLD INCOME EXTREMES

LOW:	Bryan/College Station, TX	\$42,100
HIGH:	Long Island, NY	\$100,200

AVERAGE HOME PRICE EXTREMES

LOW:	Steubenville, OH/Weirton, WV	\$58,000
HIGH:	Honolulu, HI	\$332,000

(Source: *Places Rated Almanac* (5th edition) by David Savageau and Geoffrey Loftus, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997.)

1989 INCOME BY COUNTY

	Per Capita Income	Median Household Income
Jefferson County, CO (Golden)	\$17,310	\$39,084
Boulder County, CO (Boulder)	\$17,359	\$35,322
E1 Paso County, CO (Colorado Springs)	\$14,566	\$29,604
Larimer County, CO (Fort Collins)	\$13,968	\$29,686
Morgan County, CO (Fort Morgan)	\$10,928	\$22,849
San Juan County, NM (Farmington)	\$8,911	\$22,300
Salt Lake County, UT (Salt Lake City)	\$12,222	\$30,149
Davis County, UT (Layton)	\$11,611	\$35,108
Laramie County, WY (Cheyenne)	\$12,932	\$27,571
Sheridan County, WY (Sheridan)	\$12,457	\$24,772

(Source: www.census.gov, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C.)

COST OF LIVING INDEX

Denver, CO	110.3
Colorado Springs, CO	102.7
Fort Collins, CO	103.4
Santa Fe; NM	113.6
Salt Lake City, UT	106.5
Cheyenne, WY	99.1

MEDIAN SALES PRICE OF ONE FAMILY HOMES

Denver, CO	\$171,300
Colorado Springs, CO	\$144,900
Albuquerque, NM	\$133,300
Salt Lake City, UT	\$137,900

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000* (120th edition), Washington, DC, 2000.)

WEB SITES FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.census.gov
www.officialcitysites.org

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